

March 1997

# FORCE STRUCTURE

## Potential Exists to Further Reduce Active Air Force Personnel



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United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

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**National Security and  
International Affairs Division**

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March 28, 1997

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Personnel  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Stephen Buyer  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Personnel  
Committee on National Security  
House of Representatives

This report discusses (1) how the size and composition of the active Air Force has changed since 1986, (2) whether the Air Force has sufficient numbers of personnel to meet wartime requirements, and (3) whether there is potential to further reduce the active force that could result in a more efficient force. Because of your expressed interest and oversight of military personnel issues, we are addressing this report to you. This report should be useful to your Committees in their deliberations on the future size and composition of the Air Force. The report contains a recommendation to the Secretary of the Air Force.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretaries of Defense and the Air Force and the Director, Office of Management and Budget. Copies will also be made available to others on request.

If you or your staff have any questions on this report, please call me on (202) 512-3504. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix III.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Richard Davis'.

Richard Davis  
Director, National Security  
Analysis

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# Executive Summary

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## Purpose

In 1996, Congress established minimum active duty personnel levels for each service out of concern that further downsizing would impair the Department of Defense's (DOD) ability to support two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts (MRC). The Air Force floor is 381,000 active duty personnel. Since the end of the Cold War, the Air Force has drawn down its active military forces significantly and plans to reduce the forces to 381,100 during fiscal year 1997. Because of congressional concerns about active duty personnel levels, GAO analyzed (1) how the size and composition of the active Air Force has changed since 1986, (2) whether the Air Force has any shortfalls in meeting its wartime requirements, and (3) whether there is potential to further reduce the active force. GAO did not examine the need for the number of fighter wings, bombers, and intercontinental missiles identified by DOD in its 1993 Bottom-Up Review of military requirements.

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## Background

The active Air Force is divided between mission and infrastructure forces. For each of the services, DOD's 1993 Bottom-Up Review established the mission force structure needed to conduct two nearly simultaneous MRCs and implement other elements of the national military strategy. The Air Force's planned active mission force will consist of 13 fighter wings, 161 bombers, 500 intercontinental missiles, and the forces that provide direct combat support in wartime. Mission forces are divided into the following categories: combat forces; direct support forces; command, control, and communications of combat forces; intelligence; and space. The infrastructure force comprises activities that provide support services and primarily operate from fixed locations. Infrastructure is divided into eight categories: acquisition management, force management, installation support, central communications, central logistics, central medical, central personnel, and central training.

In fiscal year 1996, active Air Force military pay was projected to be \$19.3 billion— \$7.3 billion for mission forces and \$12.0 billion for infrastructure forces. The Secretary of Defense has stated that DOD must significantly reduce its infrastructure in order to modernize its force. In April 1996, GAO reported that operations and maintenance and the military personnel appropriations must be reduced if spending for infrastructure activities is to decline, since they account for 80 percent of infrastructure funding.

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## Results in Brief

Between fiscal year 1986 and 1997, the Air Force will reduce its active military personnel from over 600,000 to 381,100, or by 37 percent. Mission forces have been reduced at a much greater rate than infrastructure forces during the last decade. As a result, approximately two-thirds of the Air Force's 381,100 active duty personnel are now allocated to infrastructure functions such as installation support and acquisition. Further, today's smaller force has a higher ratio of officers than in 1986.

Potential exists to reduce the active Air Force below the 381,100 minimum level set by Congress, without adversely affecting the Air Force's war-fighting capability. In May 1996, GAO suggested options to consolidate fighter squadrons which, if implemented, would permit the Air Force to maintain the same number of aircraft but carry out its missions with fewer active duty personnel. GAO has also reported that the Air Force could achieve savings by replacing military personnel in some administrative and support positions with civilian employees. For fiscal year 1998, the Air Force plans to seek statutory authority to reduce the active force by about 9,400 below the current minimum. GAO's analysis shows the majority of these planned decreases are in infrastructure functions.

Prompted by the Secretary of Defense's goal to reduce infrastructure to free funds for force modernization, the Air Force has recently identified a potential to reduce the active force by as many as 75,000 additional military personnel beyond fiscal year 1998. The Air Force is reviewing options for replacing military personnel assigned to infrastructure functions with civilian employees or contractors that may be able to perform some functions at less cost than military personnel. The actual number of active personnel that will ultimately be replaced will depend on the results of continuing Air Force analysis to determine whether such substitutions will be organizationally feasible and cost-effective.

The Air Force projects it would have an active wartime shortage of about 19,600 personnel if two MRCs occurred. However, the Air Force does not need additional active personnel to cover this wartime shortage because it has identified ways to compensate for the shortage, such as using the individual ready reserve<sup>1</sup> and hiring private contractors. Moreover, this shortage would present little risk in carrying out the national military strategy since it primarily affects forces that would provide operating support for bases in the United States rather than in the forces that would deploy to war. GAO agreed that the Air Force's plans to further reduce

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<sup>1</sup>The individual ready reserve is a pool of individuals who have already served in active units or the reserves and have some part of their military service obligation remaining.

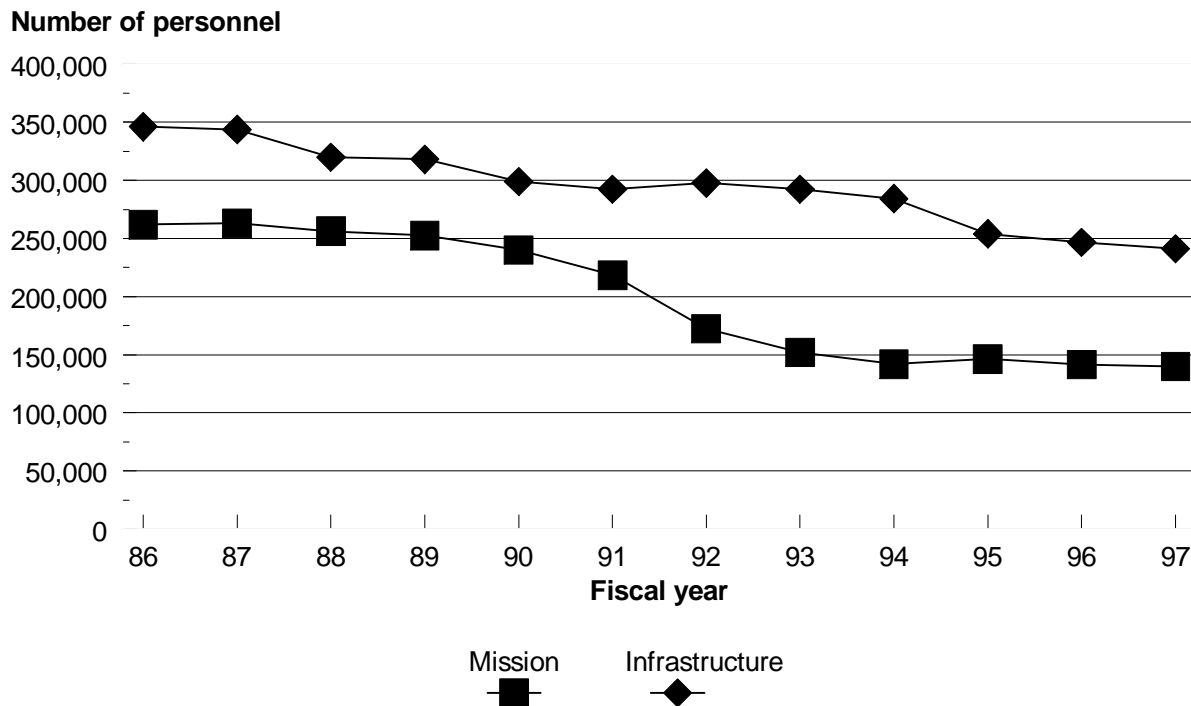
active military personnel would not exacerbate these shortages since the Air Force plans to replace military personnel with contractors or civilian employees that support infrastructure activities rather than wartime operations.

## Principal Findings

### Mission Forces Were Reduced at a Greater Rate Than Infrastructure Forces Between Fiscal Year 1986 and 1997

Between fiscal year 1986 and 1997, the active Air Force will have decreased from 608,199 to 381,100, or by 37 percent. GAO's analysis shows that mission forces decreased by 122,068, or 47 percent, and infrastructure forces by 105,031, or 30 percent, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Changes in Active Air Force End Strength



Source: DOD's Fiscal Year 1997 Future Years Defense Program.

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The Air Force decreased the mission forces primarily by reducing fighter wings, bombers, and strategic missile forces to the levels specified in the Bottom-Up Review. Decreases in installation support and central training accounted for 89 percent of the infrastructure reductions. Despite significant decreases in installation support, the Air Force still has almost 58,000 military positions in this category. Five other infrastructure categories—acquisition management, force management, central communications, central medical, and central personnel experienced decreases in military personnel ranging from 6 to 44 percent. Central logistics is the only category that had a net increase of personnel. The increase occurred primarily because military personnel associated with the strategic airlift mission were reclassified from mission forces to central logistics in 1992.

GAO's analysis shows that officer and enlisted positions in mission forces were reduced proportionately, but a higher percentage of enlisted positions were eliminated from the infrastructure category. One reason this occurred is that the central medical function, which has a high number of officers and has experienced little change over the past decade, is classified as infrastructure. The number of medical positions has remained relatively stable at about 40,000 over the past 10 years.

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### Wartime Personnel Shortfalls Identified by the Air Force Pose Little Risk to Implementing the National Military Strategy

The Air Force assesses its ability to satisfy its total wartime personnel requirements through an exercise called "FOR SIZE".<sup>2</sup> FOR SIZE determines the forces needed to deploy to each MRC, the forces needed for strategic missions such as airlift and space, and those needed to sustain base operations in the United States during wartime. Military personnel requirements determined by FOR SIZE include personnel needed to replace casualties expected to occur during two MRCs. The number of casualty replacements used in FOR SIZE is classified. FOR SIZE 95 showed the Air Force has an active shortage of about 19,600, or 5 percent, of its wartime requirements.

Air Force officials believe this shortage would not have a serious impact on their ability to implement the national military strategy since only a small percentage of the shortage is in the forces that deploy and the majority of the functional areas plan to use the individual ready reserve, contractors, and new technologies to offset the shortages. For example, security police had the largest shortage of 6,903, all of which represents a

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<sup>2</sup>Requirements for medical personnel were not included because DOD is currently conducting a study of the services' wartime medical requirements.

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shortage that would occur when security police who guard bases in peacetime deploy for wartime operations. Security personnel said they could work around the shortage by increasing workshifts, closing gates at some bases, and taking advantage of new sensor technology. Likewise, transportation had an overall shortage of 3,536, but most of it is in operating and maintaining transportation at bases in the United States.

FORSIZE does not assess whether Air Force personnel are adequate to meet the requirements for operations other than war because defense guidance assumes the forces determined to meet the requirements of two MRCs can also satisfy the needs of contingency operations. Air Force data shows that during fiscal years 1995 and 1996, certain types of units that have been frequently involved in operations other than war exceeded the Air Force goal of being deployed no more than 120 days per year. However, a July 1996 Air Force study concluded that the Air Force does not need to add more units of these types due to contingency operations, but it must closely manage units that deploy frequently to prevent excessive use. The Air Force has taken several steps in recent years to reduce the impact of operations other than war on certain units. For example, both the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard are now supporting a greater share of contingency taskings.

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### Air Force Plans to Reduce Active Duty Personnel Below Congressional Floor in Fiscal Year 1998

The Air Force plans to seek statutory authority to reduce active duty end strength by about 9,500 to about 371,600 in fiscal year 1998. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997 allows the Secretary of Defense to decrease the services' authorized end strength up to 1 percent below the floors established by Congress. However, the Air Force's planned decrease exceeds this allowance. According to Air Force officials, reducing the Air Force's military end strength will not lessen the Air Force's war-fighting capability, since the planned decreases are primarily in infrastructure functions. GAO's analysis of the planned decreases indicates that about 8,400 positions, or 88 percent, are in infrastructure functions and about 1,100, or 12 percent, are in mission forces.

The net decrease in mission forces will occur primarily from the drawdown of intercontinental ballistic missiles under the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, and the Air Force's plans to retire the EF-111 electronic support aircraft in fiscal year 1998. However, the Air Force is concerned that the Navy may not assume the electronics warfare mission within the planned time frame, which could delay these planned reductions.



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The decrease in infrastructure forces includes contracting out or civilianizing about 2,500 military positions involved in installation support and communications activities. According to Air Force officials, these positions do not need to be military because they do not deploy and are not needed to support overseas rotation needs. The Air Force also plans to start reducing the number of medical positions to adjust the size of the medical force to post-Cold War wartime medical requirements. Other efforts to reduce infrastructure include reducing the number of military positions in headquarters operations and support activities, such as the weather service.

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**Potential Exists to Reduce Military Personnel Further Below the Level Planned for Fiscal Year 1998**

The Air Force has not routinely assessed whether all positions need to remain military. However, three separate initiatives have identified the potential to replace as many as 75,000 military personnel with less costly civilian employees or contractors. By reducing its reliance on military personnel, the Air Force plans to achieve savings that can be used to fund force modernization.

For example, an ongoing Air Force headquarters-led study has identified approximately 52,600 active military positions—3,000 officer and 49,600 enlisted—that potentially could be replaced by either contractors or civilian employees. The study includes all military positions in commercial activities within the major commands in the United States and selected overseas locations. A commercial activity can be an entire organization or part of an organization that provides a product or service obtainable from a commercial source. To determine the potential for transferring functions to contractors or civilian employees, the Air Force determined the universe of personnel in commercial activities and excluded those who are required to deploy during wartime and those assigned to military-unique functions, such as headquarters activities and basic military training. The major commands are currently identifying the positions by base and work center, and determining which work centers represent good candidates for formal cost-comparison studies to determine the relative cost savings associated with using either contractors or civilian employees where military are no longer essential to their mission. Until this analysis is completed and approved by Air Force headquarters, the long range plans for reducing active duty personnel are uncertain.

Another ongoing Air Force study has identified approximately 21,600 military positions in inherently governmental functions that potentially could be filled by civilian employees. Some functions such as acquisition

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and contracting are considered inherently governmental and therefore must be performed by federal employees, but not necessarily by military personnel. In October 1996, GAO reported the Air Force could convert 6,800 officer positions in career fields such as information and financial management to civilian positions because it is not essential that they be filled by military personnel.<sup>3</sup> Such conversions could save \$69 million annually because civilian employees cost less than military personnel on average. DOD has agreed to develop an approach for making such conversions. The Secretary of the Air Force stated, however, that converting military positions to civilian positions runs counter to DOD's goal of reducing its civilian workforce and that DOD needs to allow the services some flexibility to make the most cost-effective use of its resources.

Other GAO work has identified opportunities to organize mission forces more efficiently. For example, increasing the size of fighter squadrons from 18 to 24 aircraft could permit missions to be carried out with fewer personnel at less cost. Transferring some functions from the active force to the reserves may also be possible. For example, in September 1996, GAO reported that one option for restructuring the bomber force would be to place greater numbers of B-1B bombers in the Air National Guard.<sup>4</sup> The Air Force is also assessing options to transfer some functions to the reserves.

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## Recommendation

DOD has stated it must reduce infrastructure costs in order to modernize its force. Several ongoing Air Force studies have identified potential to replace military personnel with contractors or civilian employees. Therefore, GAO recommends that, once the ongoing efforts are completed, the Secretary of the Air Force develop a plan that

- identifies time frames to study whether it is more cost-effective to transfer commercial activities now performed by military personnel to civilian employees or private contractors and
- includes time frames to convert military positions in inherently governmental functions to civilian positions.

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<sup>3</sup>DOD Force Mix Issues: Converting Some Support Officer Positions to Civilian Status Could Save Money ([GAO/NSIAD-97-15](#), Oct. 23, 1996).

<sup>4</sup>Air Force Bombers: Options to Retire or Restructure the Force Would Reduce Planned Spending ([GAO/NSIAD-96-192](#), Sept. 30, 1996).

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## Agency Comments

DOD generally agreed with the report, fully concurring with two parts of GAO's recommendation, and partially concurring with one part. DOD stated that an existing system already tracks the services' progress in completing cost comparison studies and converting positions, so there is no need to establish an additional system. GAO agreed with DOD and has modified the recommendation accordingly. DOD also stated that while FORSIZE identified an active shortage of 19,600 personnel, this shortage can be satisfied through a variety of sources, including civilians, contractors, and Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve personnel. GAO agreed with DOD's position. GAO's report reflects that the Air Force has identified several ways to compensate for these wartime shortages. The Air Force also provided technical comments on GAO's draft report, which GAO considered in preparing the final report. DOD's comments on a draft of this report are reprinted in appendix II.

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**Abbreviations**

DOD	Department of Defense
FYDP	Future Years Defense Program
GAO	General Accounting Office
MRC	Major Regional Conflict
OOTW	Operations Other Than War
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense

# Introduction

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On the basis on its 1993 Bottom-Up Review, the Department of Defense (DOD) adopted a strategy of maintaining the capability to fight and win two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts (MRC), conduct smaller scale operations such as peacekeeping, and provide overseas presence in critical regions. The Bottom-Up Review determined that the Air Force would have 20 fighter wings (13 active and 7 reserve), up to 187 bombers<sup>1</sup> (161 active and 26 reserve), and 500 intercontinental ballistic missiles to implement the strategy. The Bottom-Up Review also concluded the Air Force should maintain the capability to provide (1) airlift to transport people and equipment during conflicts, (2) reconnaissance and command and control aircraft to provide information on the location and disposition of enemy forces, and (3) aerial refuelers to enhance mission effectiveness by refueling aircraft during long-range missions. The review did not specify the number of military personnel required to implement the national military strategy. However, DOD subsequently determined that the active components would consist of about 1.4 million active military personnel, 381,000 of which would be Air Force personnel. By the end of fiscal year 1997, the Air Force plans to have an active duty force of 381,100 personnel with an associated military pay of \$16.8 billion.

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## Congressional Actions to Stem Drawdown of Active Duty Personnel

In 1996, Congress established minimum active duty personnel levels for each military service as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1996. The Air Force floor was set at 381,000. In creating the floors, Congress sought to ensure that (1) the services had enough personnel to carry out the national military strategy and (2) the drawdown of active forces was over to avoid future recruiting and retention problems. Finally, Congress believed that this level force would allow the services to manage the effects of high operations and personnel tempo.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997 retained the floor, but allowed the Secretary of Defense the flexibility in certain circumstances to decrease personnel by 1 percent of the floor. For the Air Force, this means the number of active duty personnel cannot drop below 377,200. The legislation requires the services to obtain statutory authority for decreases below the 1-percent threshold.

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<sup>1</sup>The Bottom-Up Review determined the Air Force would have 184 bombers, but DOD has subsequently increased the number to 187.

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## Active Duty Force Consists of Mission and Infrastructure Forces

Over the last several years, DOD has categorized its planned forces and funding as either mission or infrastructure. Air Force mission forces consist of the fighter wings, bombers, and intercontinental missiles (as defined in the Bottom-Up Review) and the forces that provide direct combat support; intelligence; space support; and command, control and communications in wartime. Activities that provide support to the mission forces and primarily operate from fixed locations are classified as infrastructure forces. Infrastructure is divided into the following eight categories: acquisition management, force management, installation support, central communications, central logistics, central medical, central personnel, and central training. These categories are described in appendix I. Approximately 140,000, or 36 percent, of the active Air Force personnel are currently categorized as mission forces and 241,000, or 64 percent, are in infrastructure activities.

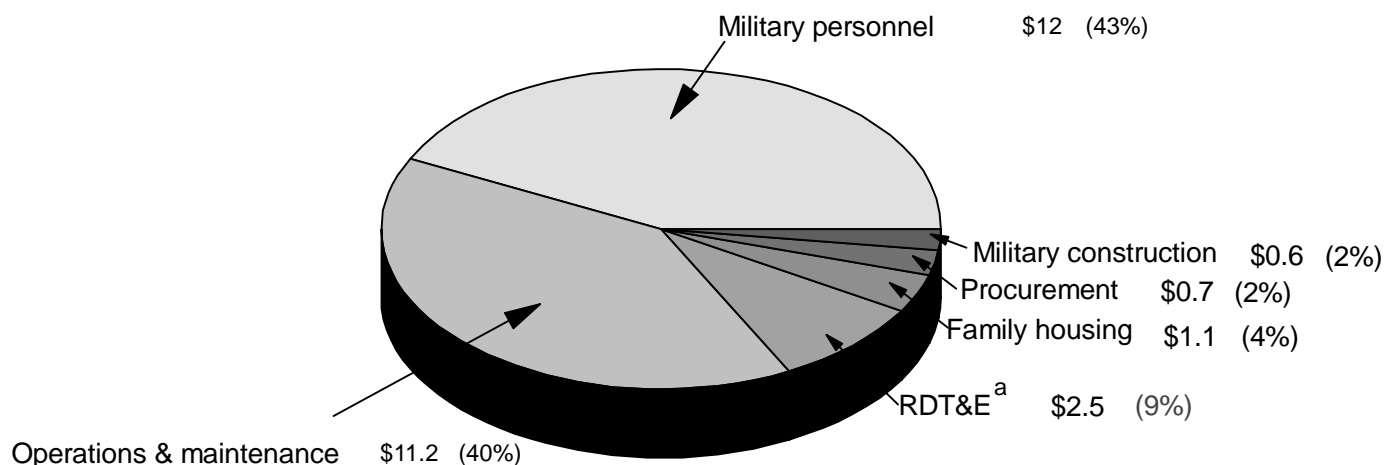
The Secretary of Defense wants to reduce and streamline infrastructure to achieve savings to modernize the force. In April 1996, we reported that operations and maintenance and the military personnel appropriations must be reduced if spending for infrastructure activities is to decline, since they account for 80 percent of infrastructure funding.<sup>2</sup> In fiscal year 1996, the Air Force spent about \$28 billion of its \$73 billion total budget on infrastructure activities. As shown in figure 1.1, about 83 percent of the Air Force's direct infrastructure costs are funded by two appropriations—military personnel and operations and maintenance.

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<sup>2</sup>Defense Infrastructure: Budget Estimates for 1996-2001 Offer Little Savings for Modernization (GAO/NSIAD-96-131, Apr. 4, 1996).

Figure 1.1: Fiscal Year 1996 Funding for Air Force Infrastructure Activities

Dollars in billions



<sup>a</sup>Research, development, test, and evaluation.

Source: Fiscal Year 1997 Future Years Defense Program (FYDP).

One of the Air Force's major initiatives to generate savings for weapons modernization is to study the potential to contract out infrastructure functions. In deciding whether a function can be transferred to contractors, the Air Force compares the relative cost of using civilian employees and private contractors to perform the same function. DOD data on cost comparisons completed between fiscal year 1978 and 1994 indicates that shifting work to contractors has reduced annual operating cost on average by 31 percent. Our initial work on another assignment indicates that such savings may not be as high as estimated by DOD, but that some savings do result.

## Air Force Processes for Determining Personnel Requirements

The Air Force uses a variety of methods to determine personnel requirements. These processes identify requirements as a function of workload or level of service based on assigned missions. The various methods include Air Force staffing standards for positions common throughout the Air Force such as security police; command staffing standards for functions unique to a particular command such as pilot



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training; a computer-generated model for aircraft maintenance positions; and crew ratios for each type of aircraft in the inventory. The Air Force does not have total control over the allocation of its personnel. For example, legislation and DOD directives establish ceilings on headquarters positions and mandate the number of positions that the Air Force must fill on the joint staff, and in unified commands and defense agencies. Table 1.1 shows the processes the Air Force uses to develop the number of active military positions required and the number of positions mandated by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and legislation.

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**Table 1.1: Means Used to Determine  
Air Force Military Personnel  
Authorizations**

Category	Positions	Percent
Air Force standards <sup>a</sup>	152,831	43
Command standards <sup>b</sup>	69,171	20
Logistics composite model	36,895	10
Headquarters	26,650	8
Staffing pattern <sup>c</sup>	22,773	6
Crew ratios <sup>d</sup>	13,755	4
Joint Staffs, defense and other federal agencies	16,837	5
Other processes	14,387	4
<b>Total<sup>e</sup></b>	<b>353,299</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>a</sup>Includes positions covered by approved variances to Air Force standards, Air Force standards awaiting approval and being revalidated, and Air Force directed requirements at wing level or below.

<sup>b</sup>Includes positions covered by approved variances to major command standards, major command standards awaiting approval and major command directed requirements at wing level or below.

<sup>c</sup>Positions primarily in the Systems Program Offices where personnel requirements vary depending on system development and production.

<sup>d</sup>Number of crews authorized per aircraft, missile and space system.

<sup>e</sup>Students, patients, prisoners, and personnel transferring between assignments account for the difference between this total and the total number of authorized active military positions.

Source: Air Force data.

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## Mandated Personnel Requirements

The requirements for some military positions are determined either by directives or legislation rather than by the Air Force. For example, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1996 restricts the Secretary of Defense from reducing military medical personnel unless DOD

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certifies that the number of people being reduced is excess to current and projected needs and does not increase the cost of services provided under the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services. Also, the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 gave the Secretary of Defense the authority to determine the number of joint officer positions. An April 1981 memorandum from the Deputy Secretary of Defense states that DOD cannot increase or decrease resources that support the National Foreign Intelligence Program without approval from the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Likewise, a December 1989 memorandum from the Deputy Secretary of Defense stated that the number of military positions within the Special Operations Command will not be adjusted unless directed by the Deputy Secretary of Defense.

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## Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Because of congressional concerns about active duty personnel levels, we assessed (1) how the size and composition of the active Air Force has changed since 1986, (2) whether the Air Force has any shortages in meeting its wartime requirements, and (3) whether there is potential to reduce the active force further. We did not examine the need for the number of fighter wings, bombers, and intercontinental missiles identified by DOD's 1993 Bottom-Up Review.

We interviewed officials and reviewed documents at OSD and Air Force headquarters, Washington, D.C.; Air Combat Command, Norfolk, Virginia; Air Force Materiel Command, Dayton, Ohio; and Air Education and Training Command, San Antonio, Texas.

To determine how the size and composition of the active force has changed, we analyzed data contained in the fiscal year 1997 FYDP and historical FYDPS. The FYDP displays the allocation of resources by programs and activities known as program elements. We used the mapping scheme developed by DOD's Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation to identify mission and infrastructure program elements. We then compared the changes in active personnel by mission and infrastructure categories between fiscal year 1986 and 1997. We used fiscal year 1986 as a starting point because it represented the peak in the number of active duty personnel, preceding the post-Cold War drawdown. We obtained data on the number of active military positions that are determined by legislation or directives, but did not assess how the requirements for these positions were determined.

To determine if the Air Force has wartime personnel shortages, we analyzed the results of the Air Force FORSIZE 95 exercise. To determine if the shortages identified by FORSIZE affected the Air Force ability to carry out the national military strategy, we interviewed Air Force headquarters functional managers to determine whether the shortages were in the forces that deploy to theaters of operation or in forces that sustain operations at bases in the United States. We also discussed their plans to resolve the shortages. Since FORSIZE did not analyze wartime requirements for medical personnel, we obtained data on wartime requirements from the Air Force Office of the Surgeon General.

To assess the potential to further reduce the active force, we analyzed the military personnel reductions planned in fiscal year 1998. Our analysis was based on the Air Force's fiscal year 1998 Budget Estimate Submission provided to OSD. In addition, we reviewed Air Force efforts to identify opportunities to replace military personnel with contractor and civilian personnel. Since these efforts have not been completed, our analysis was limited to reviewing the methodology for identifying potential positions and the plans for approving which positions will be studied or converted. In addition, we used our prior work to identify opportunities to more efficiently organize the active force.

We conducted our review from November 1995 through December 1996 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

# Mission Forces Are Being Reduced at a Faster Rate Than Infrastructure Forces

Between fiscal year 1986 and 1997,<sup>1</sup> the Air Force will reduce its active military personnel from 608,199 to 381,100, or by 37 percent. During this time, mission forces will be reduced at a much greater rate than infrastructure forces—47 percent compared to 30 percent. The Air Force reduced active military personnel primarily by (1) implementing the force structure reductions in accordance with the Bottom-Up Review, (2) closing bases, (3) transferring some missions to the reserves, and (4) reorganizing major commands and headquarters activities. Our analysis also indicated that the 1997 active duty Air Force will have a higher percentage of officers compared with the percentage in 1986.

## Mission Forces Will Decrease by Almost Half Between Fiscal Year 1986 and 1997

Between fiscal year 1986 and 1997, the Air Force will reduce its mission forces from approximately 262,000 to 140,000, or by 47 percent, as shown in table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Changes in Active Duty Personnel by Mission Category

Category	Fiscal year		Change	Percentage of change
	1986	1997		
Combat forces	112,096	61,119	(50,977)	(45)
Direct combat support	102,149	46,200	(55,949)	(55)
Command, control, and communication	20,223	9,169	(11,054)	(55)
Intelligence	17,976	18,752	776	4
Research, development, test, and evaluation	5,637	84	( 5,553)	(99)
Space	3,095	3,892	797	26
Other defense missions	837	729	(108)	(13)
<b>Total</b>	<b>262,013</b>	<b>139,945</b>	<b>(122,068)</b>	<b>(47)</b>

Source: Our analysis of DOD's FYDP data.

The decrease in combat forces primarily resulted from implementing the Bottom-Up Review force structure, which significantly reduced the

<sup>1</sup>The fiscal year 1986 total represents the actual number of active military personnel assigned at the end of the fiscal year, whereas the fiscal year 1997 figure represents the authorized number of military personnel.

number of fighter wings, bombers, and intercontinental missiles. Table 2.2 compares the force structure between fiscal year 1986 and 1997.

**Table 2.2: Comparison of Air Force Active Force Structure Between Fiscal Year 1986 and 1997**

Category	Fiscal year		Change
	1986	1997	
Fighter wings	25	13	(12)
Bombers	315	126	(189)
Intercontinental missiles	1,009	580	(429)

The Air Force reduced the number of fighter wings by retiring the F-4 and F-111 aircraft and transferring the F-15s required for the air defense of the United States as well as some close air support aircraft (A-10s) to the reserves. The Air Force reduced the bomber force by retiring the FB-111s and many B-52's. Finally, the Air Force reduced the missile force by eliminating the Minuteman II intercontinental ballistic missiles and the ground launched cruise missiles.

The decrease in direct combat support forces resulted primarily from transferring some airlift and refueling missions to the reserves and retiring some electronic warfare aircraft (RF-4Gs) and reconnaissance aircraft (TR-1s). In addition, some of the decrease resulted when the strategic airlift function was moved to the central logistics infrastructure category.

The number of military personnel in command, control, and communications positions was reduced by abolishing the Air Force Communications Command. In addition, the increase in technologies such as automation and digital communications allowed the Air Force to assign fewer people to operate and maintain needed capability.

The decrease in research, development, test, and evaluation primarily resulted from a change in the way these personnel are categorized. Prior to 1988, about 5,600 positions in acquisition and command support were included in the mission forces under the research, development, test, and evaluation activity. However, in 1988 the majority of these positions were moved to the acquisition infrastructure category when the Air Force merged two commands to form the Air Force Materiel Command.

The remaining two mission categories, intelligence and space, gained personnel. While there were decreases in some intelligence functions such as the retirement of the SR-71, they were offset by increases resulting from

the creation of the Defense Airborne Reconnaissance Office in 1994.<sup>2</sup> The increase in space forces resulted primarily because some activities that were categorized as acquisition and direct support were transferred to space.

## Infrastructure Forces Are Decreasing at a Slower Rate Than Mission Forces

Between fiscal year 1986 and 1997, the Air Force will reduce the number of active personnel in infrastructure functions from approximately 346,000 to 241,000, or by 30 percent. Significant decreases occurred in all infrastructure forces except acquisition, central medical, and central logistics as shown in table 2.3.

**Table 2.3: Changes in Active Duty Personnel by Infrastructure Category**

Category	Fiscal year		Change	Percentage of change
	1986	1997		
Acquisition management	10,196	9,569	(627)	(6)
Force management	34,016	25,280	(8,736)	(26)
Installation support	107,523	57,918	(49,605)	(46)
Central communications	21,260	16,931	(4,329)	(20)
Central logistics	12,315	25,174	12,859	104
Central medical	41,380	40,639	(741)	(2)
Central personnel	21,762	12,283	(9,479)	(44)
Central training	97,734	53,372	(44,362)	(45)
Resource adjustments <sup>a</sup>		(11)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>346,186</b>	<b>241,155</b>	<b>(105,031)</b>	<b>(30)</b>

<sup>a</sup>A means to account for the difference between programmed and actual personnel levels. A negative value indicates that overstaffing is projected for the last day of the fiscal year.

Source: Our analysis of DOD's FYDP data.

The greatest number of personnel decreases occurred in installation support and central training activities. The decline in installation support was caused primarily by the closure of 20 active air bases by the Secretary of Defense's Base Closure Commission in 1988 and the Base Closure and Realignment Commission in 1991 and 1993. The Air Force also contracted some base operations, which reduced the number of military personnel in installation support.

<sup>2</sup>The Defense Airborne Reconnaissance Office was created to unify airborne reconnaissance architectures and enhance the acquisition of manned and unmanned airborne assets and associated ground systems.

The decrease in central training was related primarily to the decreases in mission force structure. For example, the decrease in the number of wings and bombers resulted in about a 6,700 decline in the number of undergraduate pilot and navigator training positions and about an 8,500 decrease in weapons systems training positions. Likewise, the decrease in the number of strategic forces reduced training requirements by about 2,400 positions. The overall decrease in the number of active personnel caused a decline of approximately 11,300 positions in general skill level training and about 4,900 positions in recruit training units. Approximately another 4,000 positions were eliminated from contracting for base operations at training bases.

The primary reasons for the decreases in the other categories are described as follows:

- Acquisition management—This category experienced a net decrease of 627 military positions. However, in 1988 the Air Force transferred about 5,600 positions from the mission research, development, test, and evaluation category into acquisition. Since 1988, the number of military personnel in the acquisition has declined by about 5,800.
- Force management—The decreases occurred in the weather service, servicewide support, and from consolidation of various headquarters. For example, the Strategic Air Command, the Tactical Air Command, and the Military Airlift Command were combined to form the Air Combat Command and the Air Mobility Command; the Air Force Systems Command and the Air Force Logistics Command were combined to form the Air Force Materiel Command.
- Central communications—Approximately 3,900 of the decrease occurred because the smaller number of fighter wings and bombers required fewer air traffic control personnel.
- Central medical—The number of personnel in central medical has not decreased significantly. OSD and the services are currently assessing post-Cold War medical requirements. OSD is currently updating a 1994 study that will provide new estimates of wartime medical demands. However, the scheduled March 1996 completion has been delayed because OSD and the services advocate using different assumptions and methodologies for factors such as population-at-risk and casualty replacements, which affect overall medical requirements.
- Central personnel—The decrease resulted primarily because the smaller force has reduced the number of permanent change-of-station moves, accessions, and training requirements, which has reduced the number of people in transit.

Central logistics is the only infrastructure category that had a net increase of personnel. The increase resulted from a change in the way personnel associated with strategic airlift are categorized. Prior to 1992, airlift personnel were counted as direct support mission forces. However, they were moved to the central logistics category in fiscal year 1992 when the U.S. Transportation Command assumed responsibility for management of air transportation in peacetime.

Officers Now  
Represent a Larger  
Portion of the Force

Between fiscal year 1986 and 1997, enlisted personnel will be reduced by 39 percent and officers by 32 percent. Our analysis shows a proportionate decline in officer and enlisted personnel in mission forces, but a higher percentage decrease of enlisted personnel in infrastructure activities as shown in table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Changes in Officer and Enlisted Personnel in Mission and Infrastructure Forces Between Fiscal Year 1986 and 1997

	Mission forces		Infrastructure forces	
	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted
FY86	42,283	219,730	66,765	274,936
FY97	21,517	118,428	52,928	188,227
Percent Change	(49)	(46)	(21)	(33)

Source: Our analysis of DOD's FYDP data.

According to Air Force officials, one reason for the smaller percentage decrease of officers versus enlisted personnel in infrastructure functions can be attributed to the disproportionate reduction of enlisted in base operations support where major decreases have occurred. Generally, there has been one officer for every 10 enlisted positions in this category. However, our analysis of this category showed that between fiscal year 1986 and 1997, the Air Force eliminated 46,349 enlisted and 3,256 officer positions or 15 enlisted positions for every officer position eliminated.

Another reason for the smaller percentage decrease is that medical and joint/DOD positions, which have a high number of officers, are classified as infrastructure. As shown in table 2.5, the number of medical positions has remained relatively stable and the number of joint positions has decreased by 20 percent between fiscal year 1986 and 1997 while the active force as a whole declined by 37 percent. As a result, these positions have increased from 8 percent of the active force in fiscal year 1986 to 13 percent in fiscal year 1997 as shown in table 2.5.



**Table 2.5: Positions in Joint Staff/Defense Agencies and Medical Program as a Percent of Total Active Military Personnel Between Fiscal Year 1986 and 1997**

	Fiscal year	
	1986	1997
Joint/defense agencies	9,301	7,508
Medical	41,380	40,639
<b>Total</b>	<b>50,681</b>	<b>48,147</b>
Total active force	608,199	381,100
Percent joint, defense agencies, and medical of total active force	8	13

Source: Our analysis of Air Force data.

In November 1995, DOD's Office of the Inspector General reported that although the services have reduced the number of active duty personnel, there has not been a corresponding decrease in the number of positions that must be filled on the Joint Staff and in defense agencies. The report noted that the services must still give priority to joint staffing, with a substantially smaller resource pool. Finally, the Inspector General found that no standard methodology or criteria are used to determine and validate personnel requirements for positions on the Joint Staff or in defense agencies. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997 requires us to review DOD's actions in response to the Inspector General's report.

# Military Personnel Shortages Pose Little Risk to Implementing the National Military Strategy

The Air Force uses the FORSIZE exercise to estimate total wartime personnel requirements. FORSIZE 95 identified an active wartime shortage of 19,585 personnel. However, the Air Force believes this shortage has little impact on their ability to implement the national military strategy because the shortfall is primarily in forces that sustain base operations in the United States during wartime, and the Air Force has identified alternatives for satisfying these shortages. FORSIZE 95 did not analyze medical requirements. However, a separate study of medical requirements concluded that the Air Force has more active duty medical personnel than needed for wartime.

FORSIZE does not consider operations other than war (OOTW). Air Force officials stated that defense guidance assumes that the existing force requirements developed for the two MRCS can satisfy the needs of contingency operations without posing additional requirements. Air Force data shows that during fiscal years 1995 and 1996, certain types of units exceeded the Air Force goal of being deployed no more than 120 days per year. However, a July 1996 Air Force study concluded that the Air Force does not need to increase its military personnel requirements because of contingency operations, but it has to closely manage units that deploy frequently. The Air Force has taken several steps in recent years to reduce the impact of OOTWS on certain units.

## Wartime Personnel Requirements Established by FORSIZE

FORSIZE estimates the number of active and reserve forces and civilians needed to (1) deploy to support two MRCS, (2) support strategic missions such as airlift and space, and (3) sustain base operations during wartime. The initial exercise was in 1988; subsequent exercises were conducted in 1994 and 1995. There were no exercises in 1989 through 1993 because of the changing world environment, numerous Air Force command reorganizations, and the Persian Gulf War. FORSIZE 95 did not estimate medical requirements since OSD is conducting a separate study on these requirements. FORSIZE 95, which was completed in February 1996, projects wartime requirements for fiscal year 1997.

As a starting point for FORSIZE, the Air Force develops a Time Phased Force Deployment List to deploy all 20 active and reserve fighter wings and bombers required by the Bottom-Up Review. In addition, FORSIZE determines requirements for personnel needed to operate at three additional bare bases (airfields with no supporting infrastructure) and to replace casualties (personnel that are killed or wounded and cannot return to duty). Air Force officials stated that the requirement for the bare bases

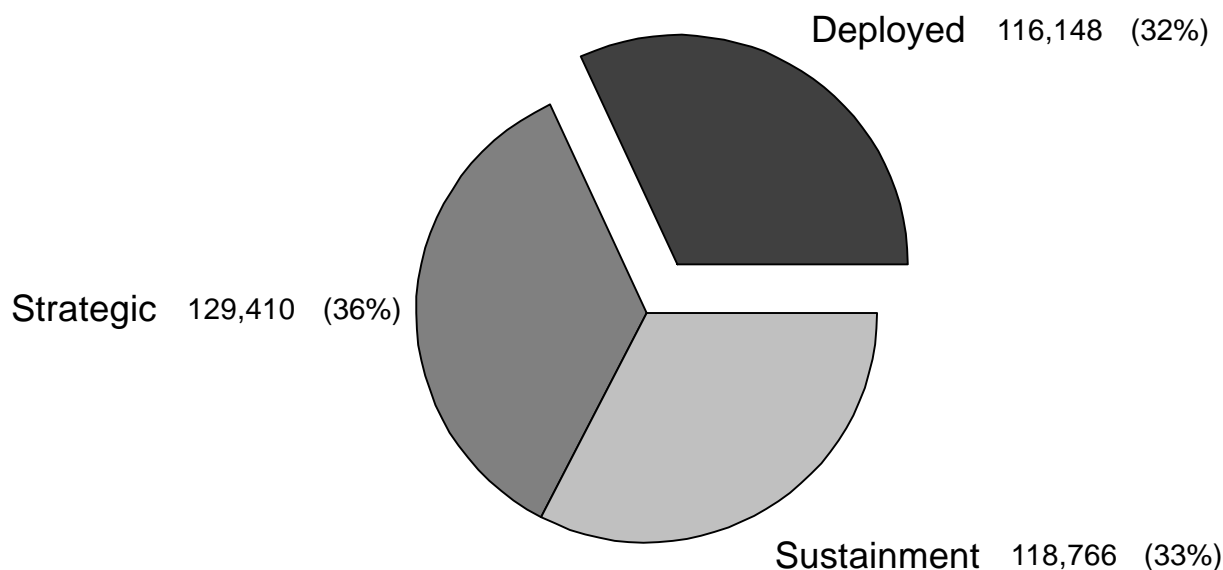
is based on the Air Force's experience during the Gulf War and other past operations.

The number of aviator positions included in FORSIZE is based on the crew ratio established for each aircraft in the Air Force's inventory. A crew ratio is the number of aircrews authorized per aircraft and is established to enable the Air Force to meet expected wartime sortie rates. For example, the current crew ratio for the F-15C is 1.25, which means that 1.25 pilots are authorized for each F-15C in the active inventory. Air Force officials noted that the actual sortie rates during the Gulf War were higher than could have been flown under the Air Force's funded crew ratios and that additional pilots from units that had not deployed were therefore used. On the basis of this experience, the Air Force has increased the crew ratio for some aircraft, increased aircraft spares, and plans to use additional pilots from the schools to achieve higher sortie rates. Air Force officials noted that it is not economically feasible to increase the crew ratios beyond current levels because they would have to buy additional aircraft and spares in order to keep all crews properly trained.

Personnel requirements for strategic and sustainment forces are determined at base level for 36 functional areas such as security police, transportation, and munitions. In determining these requirements, FORSIZE assumes that functions currently performed by military personnel will stay military. These base level assessments are intended to ensure that the Air Force has sufficient personnel at bases in the United States and overseas to (1) protect and maintain bases, (2) re-supply deploying forces, and (3) provide support to families of Air Force personnel who deploy to war and those that remain at their locations. FORSIZE then compares these requirements with authorized personnel by functional areas to determine if the Air Force has enough personnel to carry out missions specified in defense guidance.

On the basis of FORSIZE 95, the Air Force concluded that it requires 364,324 active military personnel to meet its wartime requirements (not including medical). FORSIZE did not consider whether some functions that do not deploy could be met with other than military personnel such as civilian employees or contractors. As shown in figure 3.1, the forces that deploy make-up approximately one-third of the Air Force's active military personnel requirements; strategic and sustainment forces account for the remaining two-thirds.

Figure 3.1: Breakdown of Active Wartime Personnel Requirements as Determined by FORSIZE 95



The wartime personnel requirements estimated during FORSIZE include requirements to replace casualties. This number is classified but is based on two key elements. First, the population-at-risk is determined by an Air Force threat model. The population-at-risk includes the day-to-day casualty stream of personnel within the two theaters of operation who are expected to be killed in action, wounded in action, and otherwise disabled by disease or non-battle injuries. Second, casualty rates for each career field are established based on their proximity to the war zone. The closer the career field is to the war zone, the higher the casualty rate. For example, maintenance personnel on the flight line have a higher casualty rate than maintenance personnel working in a rear area.

## Air Force Wartime Personnel Shortages Pose Little Risk

FORSIZE 95 identified a net active shortage of 19,585 personnel needed to meet wartime requirements. According to Air Force officials the shortage poses little risk to carry out the two MRC strategy because (1) it is predominantly in the forces that sustain base operations in the United States and not in the deploying forces and (2) other alternatives exist to cover most of the shortfall.

Security police, transportation, intelligence, maintenance, and munitions account for approximately 16,300, or 83 percent, of the Air Force's total shortage (see table 3.1). The remaining shortage occurred in 10 other functional areas.

**Table 3.1: Projected Active Personnel  
 Wartime Shortages for Fiscal Year  
 1997**

Functional area	Shortage	Percentage of shortage
Security police	6,903	33
Transportation	3,536	17
Intelligence	2,048	10
Munitions	1,982	9
Maintenance	1,843	9
Other functional areas	4,539	22
<b>Total—functional areas with shortages</b>	<b>20,851</b>	<b>100</b>
Functional areas where personnel are in excess to requirements	(1,266)	
Net shortage	19,585	

Source: FORSIZE 95.

According to Air Force officials, all of the shortages, except munitions, are associated with requirements for sustaining forces. The munitions shortage exists because the Air Force has a shortage of military personnel in the bomb assembly and bomb loading specialties for the bomber force. In September 1996, we reported that the Air Force cannot meet its war-fighting requirement to support the full complement of B-1B and B-52H bombers allocated to regional commanders due to these personnel shortages.<sup>1</sup> The Air Staff has tasked the Air Combat Command to develop a plan and identify funding requirements to eliminate the shortages using active or reserve personnel or a combination of both.

According to Air Force officials, the security police shortage would occur in the sustaining force when some security police personnel guarding bases in the United States deployed to theaters of operation during wartime. Such deployment would create a shortage of security personnel to guard bases in the United States. Air Force security police personnel told us they could work around the shortfall by increasing workshifts, closing some gates at bases, and taking advantage of new sensor

<sup>1</sup>Air Force Bombers: Options to Retire or Restructure the Force Would Reduce Planned Spending (GAO/NSIAD-96-192, Sept. 30, 1996).

technology. In addition, one official noted that the Air Force could also contract for part-time security personnel.

The transportation shortfall relates primarily to personnel that operate and maintain base motor pools in the United States. According to transportation officials, the individual ready reserve<sup>2</sup> could be used to offset some of the shortage.

According to a maintenance official, the maintenance shortfall represents only 2 percent of total maintenance requirements and is spread throughout a number of career fields, including jet engines, guidance and control, avionics systems, fabrication and parachute, and aircraft metal and technology. Maintenance officials told us that, because the maintenance shortfall is so small and would not impact mission readiness, they have no plans to examine alternatives to cover it.

Few of the 10 remaining functional areas, which included such functions as comptroller, fuels, judge advocate, and weather, have significant shortages. Most have a shortage that ranges between 2 and 4 percent of their wartime requirement. According to Air Force officials, these shortages will be covered primarily by using the individual ready reserve and other management actions.

In nine functional areas, authorized personnel exceeded requirements by 1,266 but the Air Force did not reallocate any of these positions to functional areas with shortages. For example, the education and training functional area had an excess of 244 personnel, but senior Air Force officials decided not to reallocate these positions until ongoing training initiatives have been completed. Likewise, there was an excess of 302 personnel in communications, but no action was taken because the career field is being merged with information management, which showed a shortage. According to an Air Force official, another reason the Air Force decided not to reallocate personnel is because the ongoing Quadrennial Defense Review may change the current national military strategy, which could change the Air Force's active requirements and the need to reallocate personnel.

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<sup>2</sup>The individual ready reserve is a pool of individuals who have already served in active units or in the reserves and have some part of their military service obligation remaining.

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## Active Military Medical Personnel Exceed Wartime Requirements

OSD and Air Force analyses indicate the Air Force has more active duty medical personnel than needed for wartime requirements, but they have not yet agreed on the actual number of personnel to be reduced. A 1994 OSD study concluded that the number of medical positions within the services exceeded projected wartime requirements. This study is currently being updated because of the services' concerns regarding the assumptions made to treat casualties and maintain peacetime operational readiness and training. However, a separate Air Force analysis showed the Air Force has about 5,900 active military medical personnel who are excess to projected wartime requirements. The Air Force expects that the ongoing OSD study will recommend reductions in medical personnel, so the Air Force plans to reduce the number of medical personnel in fiscal years 1998 through 2003.

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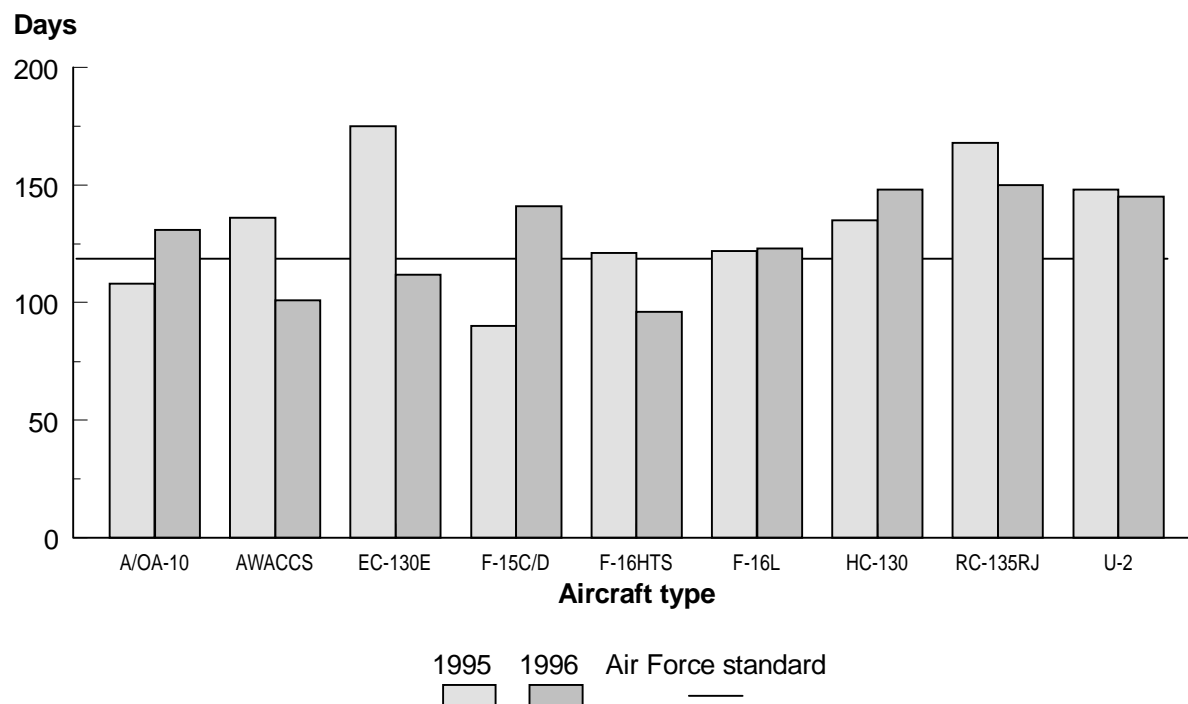
## Impact of OOTW on Air Force Personnel Requirements

The Air Force does not assess personnel requirements for OOTWS under FORSIZE. According to Air Force officials, defense guidance assumes that the existing force requirements developed for the two MRCS can accomplish OOTW deployments without posing additional requirements. Nonetheless, headquarters Air Force and Air Combat Command officials are concerned about the high operations tempo OOTWS have on certain units, and believe the Air Force must closely manage its OOTW taskings to ensure certain units are not used excessively.

Due to growing concern about the impact of OOTWS, the Air Combat Command sponsored a study of fiscal year 1994 deployment taskings. The study concluded that the Air Force did not need to increase personnel levels due to contingency operations, but noted that some functional areas were more impacted by contingency deployments than others. The study also concluded that commands and installations need to place more emphasis on accuracy and completeness of data reported for deployment requirements and actual deployments to promote a fairer distribution of taskings throughout units and across commands.

Air Force data shows that, with the exception of one type of unit in the Air Force Special Operations Command, most units that exceeded the Air Force goal of being deployed no more than 120 days per year are in the Air Combat Command. Figure 3.2 shows the Air Combat Command units that exceeded the 120-day goal in 1995 and 1996.

**Figure 3.2: Days on Temporary Duty for Selected Air Combat Command Units for Fiscal Years 1995 and 1996**



Source: Air Force data.

To reduce the impact of OOTWS on certain units, the Air Force has implemented a policy to balance the workload throughout the Air Force, reduce taskings where appropriate, and make more use of reserve forces. For example, in 1995, the Air Combat Command chose not to send A/OA—10 aircraft to fiscal year 1996 National Training and Joint Readiness Training Centers exercises in order to reduce temporary travel for these units. The Air Force has also activated associate reserve squadrons<sup>3</sup> for KC-135 refueling and E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System aircraft. Additionally, both the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard are now supporting a greater share of OOTW and other contingency taskings and have increased their participation in Joint Chief

<sup>3</sup>Air Force Reserve units that are collocated with active Air Force units that fly and maintain active aircraft.



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of Staff-sponsored exercises. This has been possible primarily due to the Air Force success in encouraging reservists to volunteer for such duty.

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## Agency Comments

DOD stated that although FORSIZE identified an active shortage of 19,600 personnel, this shortage could be addressed with a variety of sources, including technology, civilians, contractors, and Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve personnel. We agreed with DOD's position. Our report reflects that the Air Force has identified several ways to compensate for these wartime shortages.

# Opportunities Exist to Reduce the Number of Active Duty Air Force Personnel

Potential exists to reduce the number of active duty Air Force personnel significantly below the congressional floor of 381,000. In fiscal year 1998, the Air Force plans to seek statutory authority to reduce the number of active duty personnel to about 371,600 or 9,400 below the current floor. In addition, a preliminary air staff review of its infrastructure force has identified a potential to reduce the active force by as much as 75,000 beyond fiscal year 1998 by contracting out some functions now performed by military personnel and converting some military positions to civilian. Our prior work indicates that savings can occur by contracting out functions in lieu of using military personnel, and significant opportunities exist to convert military positions to less costly civilian positions.

Some opportunities may also exist to reduce mission forces. Our prior work has shown the Air Force could reduce active personnel requirements by increasing the size of its fighter squadrons and transferring some bombers to the reserves. In addition, several ongoing defense studies such as the Deep Attack Weapons Mix Study and the Quadrennial Defense Review could affect the Air Force's future active duty personnel requirements.

## Air Force Plans to Reduce Active Duty Personnel Below Congressional Floor in Fiscal Year 1998

On the basis of the Air Force's fiscal year 1998 budget proposal provided to OSD, the Air Force plans to seek statutory authority to reduce its active military end strength to about 371,600 or 9,400 below the current congressional floor. Air Force officials stated the planned personnel reductions will not lessen the Air Force's war-fighting capability, since they are primarily in infrastructure-related functions. Our analysis of the planned decrease shows that 1,125, or 12 percent, are in mission forces and 8,415, or 88 percent, are in infrastructure forces as shown in table 4.1.

**Chapter 4**  
**Opportunities Exist to Reduce the Number**  
**of Active Duty Air Force Personnel**

**Table 4.1: Comparison of Active Duty End Strength Between Fiscal Year 1997 and 1998**

Category	Fiscal year		Change	Percent
	1997	1998		
Mission Forces	139,945	138,820	(1,125)	12
<b>Infrastructure</b>				
Acquisition	9,569	8,529	(1,040)	
Force management	25,280	24,551	( 729)	
Installation support	57,918	54,846	(3,072)	
Central communications	16,931	15,807	(1,124)	
Central logistics	25,174	26,218	1,044	
Central medical	40,639	40,135	( 504)	
Central personnel	12,283	11,056	(1,227)	
Central training	53,372	51,862	(1,510)	
Resource adjustments	(11)	(264)	(253)	
Subtotal infrastructure	241,155	232,740	(8,415)	88
<b>Total</b>	<b>381,100</b>	<b>371,560</b>	<b>(9,540)</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Our analysis of DOD' FYDP and Air Force data.

The planned decrease in mission forces results primarily from three initiatives. First, the final drawdown of intercontinental ballistic missiles under the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty will reduce mission forces by 1,014 personnel. Second, the Air Force plans to retire the EF-111 electronic support aircraft in fiscal year 1998, which would reduce active military personnel by 525. However, the Air Force is concerned the Navy may not assume the electronics warfare mission within the planned time frame, which could delay these planned reductions. Finally, the Air Force plans to retire 8 C-130 aircraft, which will eliminate 360 positions. This reduction is based on a Joint Staff study that showed the Air Force has excess intra-theater airlift capacity.

The decreases in mission forces are largely offset by increases related to funding six additional B-1B bombers for training and combat operations from the reconstitution reserve,<sup>1</sup> activating an unmanned aerial vehicle squadron, and adding one Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (E-8) and one Rivet Joint (RC-135). Air Force officials noted the additional Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System and Rivet Joint aircraft will help alleviate the high personnel tempo in these units.

<sup>1</sup>Aircraft stored or on a ramp that are planned for return to operating forces in the event of mobilization or replacement.

The planned infrastructure decreases are based primarily on the Air Force's plans to either have civilian employees or contractors perform installation support and communication functions now performed by about 2,500 military personnel. The Air Force determined that these positions do not require military personnel because they do not deploy and are needed to support overseas rotation. Therefore, it plans to study the cost-effectiveness of contracting out the function or using civilian employees.

The planned decrease in installation support also includes 360 positions providing base operating support at Howard Air Force Base in Panama. The Air Force assumes that all military personnel will withdraw from Panama after the United States turns control of the Panama Canal over to Panama in 1999. However, the State Department has recently announced an effort to study the possibility of keeping some U.S. military personnel in Panama after the transfer, which may impact the Air Force's plans.

The decrease in central medical personnel represents the start of an effort to align peacetime staffing with wartime requirements. A study by the Office of the Air Force Surgeon General showed the Air Force only needed 86 percent of its projected fiscal year 1999 medical personnel to meet wartime medical needs. The Air Force has programmed a 4.5-percent reduction (1,748 personnel) through fiscal year 2003. According to Air Force officials, it will take up to 12 years to eliminate the remaining positions to minimize personnel turbulence and impact on peacetime patient care. An Air Force official stated that even though the OSD study on post-Cold War medical requirements has not been completed, officials in the Office of the Air Force Surgeon General believe the study will recommend that the services reduce the number of medical personnel. Thus, these officials believe it is prudent to start reducing the number of medical personnel now. The need for such reductions must be certified by the Secretary of Defense under 10 U.S.C. 129c.

The decrease in central personnel represents a decline in the number of personnel in transit. An Air Force official stated that the smaller force has reduced the number of permanent change-of-station moves, accessions, and training requirements, which reduces the number of people in transit.

The changes in force management are caused primarily by decreases in the number of positions in the Air Weather Service, support to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, and headquarters activities.

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Finally, the decrease in acquisition and the increase in central logistics are due to the transfer of base operations functions at test centers from the acquisition category to central logistics. Congress has directed DOD to prepare a plan to reduce the number of military and civilian personnel involved in acquisition by 25 percent over a period of 5 years beginning in fiscal year 1996. Air Force officials stated that they have not programmed this additional decrease because OSD and the services have not agreed on the definition of the acquisition workforce nor the baseline for measuring the reductions.

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## Ongoing Air Force Studies Have Identified Potential to Further Reduce Active Personnel

The Air Force has not yet fully assessed the potential for substituting less costly civilian employees or contractors for some of the active duty personnel currently assigned to infrastructure activities. In the past, the Air Force has not periodically reviewed all of its positions to determine whether they must be filled by military personnel. However, the Air Force has recently begun an effort to identify such savings to help fund force modernization. Three ongoing Air Force studies have identified the potential for eliminating a significant number of active duty personnel. Two studies involve the potential to contract out commercial activity functions now being performed by military and civilian personnel and another involves the potential for converting military positions in inherently governmental functions to civilian positions. The Air Force's ability to reduce the number of military positions identified in the ongoing studies could be constrained by DOD goals for reducing civilian positions.

DOD Directive 1100.4 requires the services to staff positions civilian personnel unless the services deem that positions must be filled by military personnel for one or more of the following reasons, including combat readiness, legal requirements, rotation, security, training, and discipline. In addition, Office of Management and Budget Circular A-76 classifies government activities as either inherently governmental functions or commercial activities. Inherently governmental functions—those intimately related to the public interest such as fund control—must be done by federal employees. A commercial activity can be an entire organization or part of an organization that provides a product or service obtainable from a commercial source. Commercial activities include functions such as vehicle and facilities maintenance, automated data processing, and administrative support. Circular A-76 sets forth the procedures for agencies to study whether the functions could be done more economically by contractors.

Potential Exists to  
 Contract or Use Civilian  
 Employees for Some  
 Commercial Activities Now  
 Performed by Military  
 Personnel

An ongoing Air Force study has identified about 52,600 active military positions allocated to functions that could potentially be performed by contractors or civilian employees.<sup>2</sup> These positions have tentatively been identified as not military essential because their personnel do not deploy, support the rotation of forces to overseas bases and operations, or perform unique military missions or functions. The Air Force study is scheduled to be completed by the end of April 1997.

The functional areas under review consist of all military positions in commercial activities within the Air Force's major commands in the continental United States and some overseas locations. The Air Force has about 160,400 military positions in commercial activities. The Air Force has deemed that 82,700 of these positions must be filled by military personnel because they would deploy during wartime; about another 25,100 of these positions are in military-unique functions such as headquarters activities, recruiting, basic military training, and those personnel needed to maintain an overseas rotation base. Once these positions were eliminated from consideration, the Air Force was left with about 52,600 military in commercial activities that could be studied for possible conversion, as shown in table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Military Positions in  
 Commercial Activities That Potentially  
 Could Be Contracted Out or Filled by  
 Civilian Employees

Function	Officer	Enlisted	Total	Percent
Logistics	541	24,885	<b>25,426</b>	48
Communications	1,348	14,257	<b>15,605</b>	30
Personnel	320	4,850	<b>5,170</b>	10
Civil engineering	327	3,261	<b>3,588</b>	7
All others	456	2,334	<b>2,790</b>	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,992</b>	<b>49,587</b>	<b>52,579</b>	<b>100</b>
Percent	6	94	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Air Force data.

To further assess the potential to contract out or use civilian employees for these positions, the Air Staff has provided each major command with the number of positions within their respective commands that are candidates for conversion. Each command is currently identifying the positions by base and organization to determine how many functions could be studied further to determine the relative cost savings associated with replacing military personnel with either contractors or civilian

<sup>2</sup>The study also identified about 55,000 civilian positions that could be potentially replaced by contractor personnel.

employees. The major commands are also required to identify barriers to contracting and recommend ways to overcome them. For example, current Air Force procedure exempts such units from being studied as candidates for conversion, if some personnel in the unit are expected to deploy. Air Staff officials noted the major commands may be able to identify ways around this problem in some cases, such as reorganizing units or transferring functions between bases.

In a November 1996 letter to the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Air Force stated that DOD's existing civilian workyear policy needs to be modified so the Air Force can achieve savings by replacing military personnel assigned to positions that are not military essential with civilians. The letter noted that the Air Force's experience has shown that 40 percent of the cost comparison studies performed since 1979 determined that an in-house civilian workforce was more cost-effective than contractors. When a function that was predominantly performed by military personnel remains in-house, the Air Force may have to increase the number of civilian employees, which runs counter to DOD's efforts to reduce its civilian workforce. For example, the maintenance training function at Altus Air Force Base was performed by 1,444 personnel, of whom 1,401 were military and 43 were civilian employees. The cost comparison showed that an in-house civilian workforce would be more cost-effective than using the private sector. Thus, the Air Force had to increase the number of civilian employees by 692 in order to achieve the projected savings. The Secretary of the Air Force stated that the goals for civilian downsizing pose a disincentive for accomplishing work in the least costly manner and that some consideration should be given to relaxing civilian downsizing goals in such cases.

The Air Force is also conducting a study to determine if there are opportunities to consolidate its 126 precision measurement electronic laboratories and have the work performed by civilian employees or contractors. There are about 1,200 military personnel in 50 labs in the active force, and the remaining labs are operated by contractors or are in the guard and reserve forces. These personnel are not included in the universe of military positions in commercial activities that could potentially be performed by civilian employees or contractors. According to an Air Force official, the preliminary study results indicate that the Air Force could consolidate from 126 to around 50 labs. This official noted that the final report, scheduled to be issued in April 1997, will contain a plan to consolidate the labs as well as for conducting cost comparison studies.

Potential Exists to Convert  
 Some Military Positions  
 That Involve Inherently  
 Governmental Functions  
 to Civilian Positions

The Air Force reviewed all military positions in inherently governmental functions to determine if military personnel are required. Military personnel were considered necessary if the position deployed, supported overseas rotation, was required by law, or was in a unique military function such as the honor guard or recruiting. On the basis of this criteria, the Air Force identified approximately 21,600 military positions that are not military essential and can potentially be converted to civilian positions as shown in table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Military Positions by  
 Functional Area That Potentially Could  
 Be Converted to Civilian Positions

Function	Officer	Enlisted	Total	Percent
Operations	1,779	8,600	10,379	48
Acquisition	5,341	529	5,870	27
Intelligence	219	1,121	1,340	6
Civil engineering	0	1,304	1,304	6
Other	409	2,287	2,696	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,748</b>	<b>13,841</b>	<b>21,589</b>	<b>100</b>
Percent	36	64	100	

Source: Air Force data.

Air Force officials told us they were preparing a briefing for senior Air Force leadership on the issues concerning military to civilian conversions. These officials stated that some of the major commands believe that many of the positions should remain military. For example, the Air Force Materiel Command believes all the acquisition positions should remain military because military personnel assigned to these positions bring operational and flightline experience, which is invaluable to developing new systems. However, we believe there is a good basis for studying the potential to replace some military personnel assigned to acquisition functions with civilian employees. According to DOD's fiscal year 1997 FYDP, 41 percent of the Air Force's acquisition workforce is military while only 12 percent of the Army's is military. An Air Force official stated that the senior Air Force leadership will decide which, if any, positions will be converted from military to civilian. This official stated that no date has been set for the briefing.

In October 1996, we reported that the Air Force could save \$69 million by converting 6,800 officer positions in such fields as acquisition and financial management to civilian positions because they are not military essential.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>DOD Force Mix Issues: Converting Some Support Officer Positions to Civilian Status Could Save Money (GAO/NSIAD-97-15, Oct. 23, 1996).



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We found that civilian employees cost between \$1,261 and \$15,731 less annually than military personnel depending on the grade and rank. In October 1994, we reported that similar opportunities exist for converting enlisted support positions to civilian employees.<sup>4</sup> Both of our reports noted that a number of impediments exist to military to civilian conversions. For example, guidance provides commanders with wide latitude in justifying the use of military personnel, and local commanders are perceived to prefer military rather than civilian employees in certain positions. Nonetheless, we noted these barriers can be overcome with active participation of senior managers. DOD concurred with our reports and agreed to convene a panel of senior managers within OSD, the joint staff, and the military services to examine the issue of military to civilian conversions. An OSD official stated that the issues concerning military to civilian conversions will be addressed as part of the Quadrennial Defense Review.

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## Consolidating Fighter Squadrons Would Reduce Military Personnel

Until recently, Air Force fighter wings were predominantly organized in three squadrons of 24 aircraft. However, the Air Force has decided to reduce its squadron size to 18, which also reduced its wing size to 54. This change in unit size increased the number of wings and squadrons to more than would have been needed had the squadron size stayed at 24.

In May 1996, we reported that the Air Force's arguments for using smaller squadrons do not justify the additional cost.<sup>5</sup> Air Force officials maintain that more squadrons are needed to provide the Air Force flexibility to respond to numerous potential conflicts across the globe. Although the Air Force considers smaller fighter squadrons beneficial, it had not performed any analysis to justify its decision. We developed several options for consolidating the fighter force that would permit the Air Force to maintain the same number of aircraft but carry out its missions with fewer active duty personnel. Our options could eliminate between two and seven squadrons, and also eliminate a wing and/or fighter base and reduce operating costs up to \$115 million annually.

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<sup>4</sup>DOD Force Mix Issues: Greater Reliance on Civilians in Support Roles Could Provide Significant Benefits ([GAO/NSIAD-95-5](#), Oct. 19, 1994).

<sup>5</sup>Air Force Aircraft: Consolidating Fighter Squadrons Could Reduce Costs ([GAO/NSIAD-96-82](#), May 6, 1996).

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## Other Efforts Could Impact Air Force Requirements for Active Military Personnel

The Air Force's requirements for active duty personnel could also be affected by several ongoing initiatives and studies. These include an Air Force study of the active/reserve force mix, DOD's Deep Attack Weapons Mix Study, and the Quadrennial Defense Review required by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997.

The Air Force is assessing options to transfer some functions now performed by the active force to the reserves. The Air Force plans to examine changes to the mix of active to reserve forces after the Quadrennial Defense Review is completed. Moreover, in our September 1996 report on DOD's bomber force, we reported one option for restructuring the bomber force would be to place more B-1Bs in the Air National Guard.<sup>6</sup> This option would reduce the cost to maintain DOD's bomber force while maintaining DOD's force of 95 B-1Bs. In 1993, DOD reported to Congress that placing B-1Bs in the Air National Guard would result in no loss of war-fighting capability.

A major benefit of transferring bombers to the reserve component is that reserve units have traditionally been less expensive to operate than their active duty counterparts. These savings are attributed to two factors. First, DOD expects that an Air National Guard squadron will require fewer flying hours than an active squadron because Air National Guard units are able to recruit more experienced pilots who require less frequent training to maintain their proficiency. Personnel costs are the second major factor that account for the Air National Guard's lower cost. In comparison with active squadrons that consist primarily of active duty military personnel, Air National Guard units rely heavily on less-costly civilians and part-time Guard personnel.

In addition, DOD's ongoing Deep Attack Weapons Mix Study could change DOD's requirements for fighters and bombers, which would impact Air Force military personnel requirements. The Commission on Roles and Missions recommended that DOD conduct a DOD-wide cost-effectiveness study to determine the appropriate number and mix of deep attack capabilities currently fielded and under development by all the services. The first part of the study, which was to be completed in late 1996, was expected to analyze weapons mix requirements for DOD's planned force structure in 1998, 2006, and 2014 and determine the impact of force structure changes on the weapon systems mix. As of February 1997, OSD was reviewing the results of this first phase and had not made the results

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<sup>6</sup>Air Force Bombers: Option to Retire or Restructure the Force Would Reduce Planned Spending (GAO/NSIAD-96-192, Sept. 30, 1996).

public. The second part of the study will analyze trade-offs among elements of the force structure, such as bombers and tactical aircraft, for the same years and is to be completed in early 1997. The study should provide DOD with an opportunity to identify options to reduce some of its extensive ground attack capabilities, which could impact requirements for active duty personnel.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997 requires the Secretary of Defense to conduct a quadrennial review of the defense program. The first review, now underway, is scheduled to be completed in May 1997. It will examine defense strategy, force structure, force modernization and infrastructure and develop a defense strategy to the year 2005. The legislation also established a National Defense Panel to provide an independent assessment of DOD's quadrennial review as well as to develop alternative force structures that could meet anticipated threats to the national security of the United States. The results of these studies could also impact the number of active duty military personnel.

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## Conclusions

Potential exists to replace active military personnel with contractors or civilian employees. These potential reductions should not impact the Air Force's ability to implement the national military strategy, since they are in the infrastructure forces rather than in the forces that deploy during wartime. The actual number of active military positions that could be eliminated depends on the results of several ongoing initiatives as well as senior Air Force leadership commitment to reduce infrastructure to fund force modernization. We believe that it is important for the Air Force to move as quickly as possible to complete its studies and make the conversions to contractor and civilian employees in view of the recurring savings that could be achieved. Developing a plan and time frames for such cost comparisons and conversions would permit the Air Force leadership to monitor efforts to reduce infrastructure.

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## Recommendation

DOD has stated it must reduce infrastructure costs in order to modernize its force. Several ongoing Air Force studies have identified potential to replace military personnel with contractors or civilian employees. Therefore, we recommend that, once the ongoing studies are completed, the Secretary of the Air Force develop a plan that

- 
- identifies time frames to study whether it is more cost-effective to transfer commercial activities now performed by military personnel to civilian employees or private contractors and
  - includes time frames to convert military positions in inherently governmental functions to civilian positions.

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## Agency Comments

DOD fully concurred with two parts of our recommendation and partially concurred with one part. DOD stated that an existing system already tracks the services' progress in completing cost comparison studies and converting positions, so there is no need to establish an additional system. We agreed with DOD and have modified the recommendation accordingly.

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# Categories of Defense Infrastructure

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Acquisition management consists of all program elements that support program management, program offices, and production support, including acquisition headquarters, science and technology, and test and evaluation resources. This category includes earlier levels of research and development, including basic research, exploratory development, and advanced development.

Force management consists of all programs that provide funding for personnel for the management and operation of all the major military command headquarters activities. Force management also includes program elements that provide resources for defensewide departmental headquarters, management of international programs, support to other defense organizations and federal government agencies, security investigative services, public affairs activities, and criminal and judicial activities.

Installation support consists of activities that furnish personnel to provide facilities from which defense forces operate. Activities include construction planning and design, real property maintenance, base operating support, real estate management for active and reserve bases, family housing and bachelor housing, supply operations, base closure activities and environmental programs.

Central communications consists of programs that manage all aspects of the command, control and communications infrastructure for DOD facilities, information support services, mapping and charting products, and security support. This category also includes program elements that provide nontactical telephone services, the General Defense Intelligence Program and cryptological activities, the Global Positioning System, and support of air traffic control facilities.

Central logistics consists of programs that provide support to centrally managed logistics organizations, including management of material, operation of supply systems, maintenance activities, material transportation, base operations and support, communications, and minor construction.

Central medical consists of programs that furnish personnel that provide medical care to active duty military personnel, dependent, and retirees. Activities provide for all patient care, except for that provided by medical units that are part of direct support units. Activities include medical

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training, management of the medical system, and support of medical installations.

Central personnel consists of all programs that provide recruiting of new personnel and the management and support of dependent schools; community, youth, and family centers; and child development activities. Other programs supporting personnel include permanent change of station costs, personnel in transient, veterans education assistance and other miscellaneous personnel support activities.

Central training consists of program elements that provide resources for virtually all non unit training, including training for new personnel, aviation and flight training, military academies, officer training corps, other college commissioning programs, and officer and enlisted training schools.

# Comments From the Department of Defense



PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

MAR 7 1997



Mr. Richard Davis  
Director, National Security Analysis  
National Security and International Affairs Division  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Davis:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report, "FORCE STRUCTURE: Potential Exists to Further Reduce Active Air Force Personnel," dated January 29, 1997 (GAO Code 701078/OSD Case 1288). The DoD generally concurs with the report. However, DoD would like the GAO to expand its definition of the term "active forces" throughout the report. The Department believes that, although FORSIZE identified a shortfall of 19,600 personnel, this shortage can be addressed with a variety of manpower sources, including civilians, contractors, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve personnel.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report. The DoD detailed comments to the recommendations are provided in the enclosure. Technical changes for accuracy and clarification were provided separately. My point of contact on this matter is CDR Dave Skocik. He can be reached at 614-5133, or electronically at skocikd@pr.osd.mil.

Sincerely,

Edwin Dorn

Enclosure:  
As stated





GAO DRAFT REPORT, DATED JANUARY 29, 1997  
(GAO CODE 701078/OSD CASE 1288)

"FORCE STRUCTURE: POTENTIAL EXISTS TO FURTHER REDUCE  
ACTIVE AIR FORCE PERSONNEL"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO  
THE GAO RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO noted the DoD has stated that it must reduce force infrastructure costs in order to modernize its force, and that several ongoing Air Force studies have identified the potential to replace military personnel with contractors or civilian employees. Therefore, the GAO recommended that, once the ongoing studies are completed, the Secretary of the Air Force develop a plan that identifies time frames to study whether it is more cost-effective to transfer commercial activities now performed by military personnel to civilian employees or private contractors. (p. 10, p. 54/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT REPORT: CONCUR. On January 1, 1997, the Air Force established a formal outsourcing and privatization office. The charter of this new office is to lead a cross functional team of representatives to develop an over-arching strategy for Air Force outsourcing. Just as the GAO recommended, once the JUMPSTART studies are completed in late summer of 1997, this new office will develop and publish a strategy that will result in an optimized work force in Air Force commercial activities.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO also recommended that, once the ongoing studies are completed, the Secretary of the Air Force develop a plan that includes time frames to convert military positions in inherently governmental functions to civilian positions. (p. 10, p. 54/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT REPORT: CONCUR. It must be noted, however, that the presence of impediments such as the ongoing civilian personnel drawdown and military strength floors will continue to make it difficult to implement any large scale conversions.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO further recommended that, once the ongoing studies are completed, the Secretary of the Air Force develop a plan that establishes a mechanism for tracking the Air Force progress in completing cost-comparison studies, converting positions, and achieving savings. (p. 10, p. 54/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT REPORT: PARTIALLY CONCUR. The Department agrees that a mechanism should exist for tracking Service progress in completing cost-comparison studies, converting positions, and achieving savings. The Commercial Activities Management Information System (CAMIS) database, required by OSD, was implemented years ago by the Services. This system already tracks the progress of cost comparisons. The DoD believes that the development of an additional system would be duplicative, and is not necessary.

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